

**Fort Matanzas National Monument**  
**Monthly Resource Management Update**  
**January 31, 2012**

And You Thought Your Monday Was Rough....

Raccoons are known for being curious animals, but who knew they had an interest in driving boats? On January 30th, park staff were preparing for an ordinary day at Fort Matanzas when they discovered a nautically inclined raccoon had stowed away on one of the two ferry boats. He had taken shelter under the captain's console and was not interested in coming out. Since raccoons are not listed on the ship's manifest, a command decision was made to extract the varmint from under the console and continue with the boat's morning preparations.

How many park rangers does it take to extract a raccoon? There were the two boat captains, two law enforcement rangers, and the resource management specialist, at least. The federal workforce sprang into action with a pole and a bucket of water. After being gently poked and prodded with a long pole by the district ranger while the resource manager banged on the console from the other side, the raccoon eventually decided to give up his dream of piloting a vessel and made a break for it.

The bucket of water proved unnecessary, and luckily so, since dousing raccoon-nibbled wiring is probably not covered under the boat's warranty. The adventurous raccoon chose as his escape path the outer lip of the floorboard which runs along the outside of the boat's railing. He made it almost all the way around before slipping and plunging into the Matanzas River. The very wet and chastised-looking raccoon "raccoon-paddled" his way to shore and scampered away into the brush. Well and enough excitement for any average raccoon for one day, one would think.....

However.....that very afternoon, park staff were informed by visitors that the male great horned owl wasn't looking himself, and we were asked to take a look. At the very top of a cedar tree near the female owl's nest tree (which contains one small owlet) we saw not the usual male owl keeping watch, but rather an air-dried raccoon! The male owl was nowhere in sight. That is not unusual since the recent hatching of the owlet, since the male must now spend more time hunting to feed his growing family.

All assembled were curious as to what might happen when the male owl did return from hunting or napping to find a breathing fur ball curled up in a tree near his mate's nest. Curiosity was sated about dusk. The male owl flew in and promptly dove and hit the raccoon with his talons before alighting on a nearby tree. Not having quite achieved his goal, the owl then took flight once more and dove in on the cowering raccoon. Whack!! This time the raccoon was knocked from his perch, fell down through the branches, and eventually free-fell to the ground, landing with a thud.

Amazingly, the raccoon immediately scampered underneath a nearby bench, and then (visibly limping) ran for the visitor center building, hugged the walls till he made it around to the back side, and finally escaped into the brush. This little raccoon may have had one of the worst Mondays in the history of raccoons, so the next time you're having a bad start to your work week, remember, it could always be worse... a LOT worse.